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SUBJECT: ATTORNEY GENERAL HOLDER'S VISIT TO BARBADOS SETS
POSITIVE COURSE FOR REGIONAL COOPERATION

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. D. Brent Hardt, reasons 1.4 (b,d)
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SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Attorney General Eric Holder's May 21-24 visit to Barbados generated enormous goodwill both in Barbados and more broadly among CARICOM Attorneys General. The visit, which received glowing press in Barbados, charted a positive agenda for judicial and law enforcement cooperation between the U.S. and the Caribbean. Barbados in particular approached the meetings with an apparent readiness to lead within the region and to work in close partnership with the U.S. on law enforcement and security issues. The visit reinforced the outcome of the May 20 Suriname Meeting on Caribbean security, and also provided a forum to follow up on the President's desire articulated at the Summit of the Americas to increase U.S. engagement with the Caribbean to address security challenges. CARICOM AGs, though still somewhat stuck in neutral on issues like criminal deportees, showed signs of willingness to shoulder greater responsibilities for local law enforcement and crime prevention. End summary.

A HERO'S WELCOME

¶2. (U) Attorney General Eric Holder was treated to a hero's homecoming during a three-day visit to Barbados to discuss future cooperation in law enforcement and judicial issues with regional counterparts. Barbados' political and cultural elite pulled out all the stops in honoring a "son of the soil" in public events on May 22 and 23. The government named a newly-completed municipal complex, built in the AG's father's home parish, in his honor, and followed up with a gala reception in Parliament Square the next evening, which featured a rarely-offered tour of the private offices of the Parliament and an appearance by, inter alia, Barbados' sole living national hero and cricket legend Sir Garfield Sobers. Local press covered both the cultural and substantive events extensively and uniformly positively.

¶3. (U) The substantive focus of the visit, furthering our regional security, judicial and law enforcement cooperation

agenda, was divided into two meetings: a bilateral consultation with the government of Barbados on May 22, and a half-day informal dialogue with nine CARICOM Attorneys General on May 23. In addition, Holder had a private meeting with Barbados PM Thompson on May 22 (reported septel).

SECURITY: LEADERSHIP, BURDENSHARING KEY

¶4. (C) The Barbados bilateral meeting, chaired by PM Thompson, focused on security cooperation, judicial and law enforcement cooperation, and anti-tax haven initiatives. Framing the overall relationship, Thompson noted that while Barbados still adhered to the "friends to all, satellites of none" doctrine, he recognized that some friends -- like the U.S. -- have been better than others. He noted that Barbados has made a concerted effort in recent years, and allocated significant resources, to bolster its own and the region's security. He cited a new coastal radar surveillance system, construction of a new Coast Guard headquarters, and purchase of three new 140-foot Coast Guard vessels, along with Barbados' continued financing of the Regional Security System (despite the neglect of its other members), as evidence of the country's commitment to regional security.

¶5. (C) Thompson averred that Barbados has no ambition to be the sole security provider for the region, nor does it want to "lord it over" regional neighbors on security issues. The fact remained, though, that no other Eastern Caribbean country has met its obligations to assist in funding the RSS. This "depletion of resources" in other Eastern Caribbean

countries is an increasing source of concern to Barbados, Thompson said. While Barbados recognizes the value of the RSS, and sees it as the natural basis for an integrated regional security network that includes both air and sea assets, he said his country simply could not sustain indefinitely the sole financing of RSS operations and assets.

He suggested that a sustainable RSS might also be in the security interest of the USG, since the RSS offers the most promising platform for counter-narcotics operations, and asked the Attorney General to consider increased USG support for sustaining the RSS.

¶6. (C) To make the best use of the region's limited assets, Thompson cited a need for better intelligence and information sharing among the CARICOM partners and between CARICOM and the U.S. He also agreed with Antigua that there is a need for a security presence at the northern end of the Lesser Antilles to improve the operational capabilities of any future regional security system. (The U.K. recently ended decades of support to a Coast Guard training facility in Antigua.) Finally, Thompson acknowledged the need for Barbados and for CARICOM to complete their "shopping list" of security needs and priorities as they promised SECDEF at the Hemispheric Defense Ministerial in Banff in September, 2008.

¶7. (C) The Attorney General welcomed Barbados' leadership on regional security issues, and affirmed that the USG is looking actively for new ways to engage with the region. He said Barbados is well placed to take a leadership role, and acknowledged Thompson's "legitimate concern" over funding for the RSS. Noting the President's pledge for additional security assistance during the Summit of the Americas and the recent Suriname meeting between CARICOM and the USG to start planning cooperative activities, the Attorney General told Thompson that the USG would look to the region for input on what the key security requirements are, and suggested that Barbados could and should take an effective leadership role in shaping that discussion. He reaffirmed the President's pledge that the USG looks at this as an equal partnership, with both sides working together to address common threats.

¶8. (C) Turning to judicial and law enforcement cooperation, Thompson thanked the Attorney General for the long-standing tradition of productive cooperation between Barbados and U.S. law enforcement agencies on training and MLAT issues.

Barbados AG Freundel Stuart cited judicial modernization and rehabilitation of ex-criminals among his key concerns.

Courts, he noted, are badly outdated, understaffed, under-trained, and under-equipped to efficiently process an increasingly heavy caseload. Basic equipment and training were lacking, and laws and statutes were not keeping pace with modern criminal undertakings. Although Barbados now has a state-of-the-art prison facility, Stuart said it lacks rehabilitation programs and resources, and has no drug rehab program in place despite rising drug use among Barbadian youth.

¶9. (C) Stuart also claimed that re-integration of criminal deportees from the U.S. remained a weak spot. While Barbados respected the USG's right to deport criminal aliens, Stuart suggested it was not in America's own security interest to send them back without a safety net, as these elements could destabilize Barbados which would ultimately impact security in the U.S. Stuart assured the Attorney General that his only goal was to make sure the process was effectively managed, and, in this regard, suggested that better information sharing, to include more complete past criminal histories for all returnees, would be helpful.

¶10. (C) The Attorney General agreed that improved information sharing would be helpful, and committed to looking into ways to improve on the documentation that the USG provides on returning deportees. He also expressed a willingness to work with Barbados on any number of potential cooperative programs for judicial modernization -- he cited

model programs on paperless court transcription, skills training for prisoners, re-entry programs, and drug court pilot programs as possible areas for collaboration, and offered to host Stuart or technical staff for visits to look at some of the programs underway in the U.S. Deputy Assistant AG Bruce Swartz pointed out that the USG and Barbados could work together on regional electronic fingerprinting initiatives, digital ballistic databases, and other programs, and encouraged Barbados to sign on to the INTERPOL I 24/7 initiative to allow for round-the-clock access to INTERPOL databases and assistance.

TAX HAVENS - GIVE US SOME CREDIT

¶11. (C) Finally, on Tax Haven initiatives, Barbados Foreign Minister Maxine McClean noted that, while pleased that Barbados has been placed on the OECD "white list" of tax jurisdictions, the continuing initiative in the G-20 to push for anti-"tax haven" legislation remained an issue of concern for Barbados. Barbados, she said, is a model of low tax jurisdiction best practices, and wants very much to avoid being lumped in with "grey list" jurisdictions in the Eastern Caribbean. In this regard, she asked the USG for a public declaration of support to solidify perceptions of Barbados as a "white list" jurisdiction. McClean also noted that Barbados was working with regional neighbors to improve their own standards for their offshore financial sectors to bring them into compliance with OECD standards, adding that parallel USG technical assistance would be useful. PM Thompson further noted that OECS heads of government had agreed to work with Barbados to set up a special facility to help these jurisdictions become compliant. The Attorney General recognized Barbados' leadership and said we should look for ways we could work together to bring other jurisdictions up to the standard Barbados had set, building on their example and experiences.

CARICOM AG'S: TAX HAVENS, DEPORTEES HEADLINE

¶12. (C) Concerns about U.S. Tax Haven initiatives figured prominently in the Attorney General's informal meeting with the Attorneys General of Antigua, the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts, St. Lucia, and Suriname, along with the CARICOM secretariat. The common refrain, reiterated by several AGs, was that these small jurisdictions were willing to abide by global standards, but were concerned that the playing field was not level. They noted that some countries, like Singapore, were not subjected to pressure, while small vulnerable Caribbean states were under pressure from other countries (implicitly, the U.S.) to meet standards that they did not meet themselves. Making matters worse, the offshore sector accounts for a significant share of GDP and employment in most of these small countries, so that action against these sectors could severely damage the region's economic viability. The AGs said they were willing to achieve compliance, but would need U.S. technical assistance to get there. The desired end-state, they agreed, should be a global standard that every country would meet. While noting the importance of the tax haven issue to the administration and its desire to curb abuses, the Attorney General assured the AGs that the U.S. was not targeting the Caribbean and had no interest in shutting down the economic engines of the islands. The last thing the USG wanted, he pointed out, was to see countries closest to us suffering from any non-uniform application of offshore finance standards. Solid economies in the Caribbean, he noted, are good for the U.S. as well, and he pledged to work with regional leaders to try to level the playing field. To this end, he asked the AGs to provide him with specific examples of how the playing field was not level.

COOPERATION ON CRIME AND SECURITY

¶13. (C) The discussion then turned to cooperation on crime and security, with Barbados AG Stuart observing that as the Merida Initiative in Mexico takes root, traffickers will look for alternate routes to the U.S. market. He urged his colleagues and AG Holder to work together proactively, rather than reactively, looking for better exchange of information, new legislation, and common approaches. A number of AGs noted the lack of educational and employment opportunities in their countries served as catalysts for local youth to become involved in crime and drugs, and they welcomed U.S. ideas for programs to address the issues. They affirmed the urgent need for judicial modernization, especially in laws and statutes to assist in prosecution of sophisticated crimes such as money laundering and narco-trafficking. They requested additional assistance to strengthen local capabilities to conduct covert operations against drug traffickers and other criminals, and to improve evidence collection and crime scene investigation. Saint Kitts' AG lamented the dramatic increase in the number of firearms and gangs in his country and appealed for help in investigating gun crimes, prosecuting those in possession of firearms, and developing legislation to deal with gangs.

¶14. (C) The Attorney General reaffirmed the USG's desire to work with the region as partners to anticipate problems rather than react to them, which would ultimately be more costly and disruptive. He acknowledged that the U.S. is a demand driver for drugs and money laundering. Noting that Washington does not have all the answers, he welcomed inputs from Caribbean experts, and conveyed his appreciation for the frank discussions and the specific, concrete ideas that came out of the talks with recommendations for clear programmatic responses. Observing that criminals do not respect national borders, he encouraged his Caribbean counterparts to continue working on cooperative efforts and regional solutions to specific identified problems. He noted the President's pledge of \$45 million for security assistance, adding that the administration looked at that number as a "down payment" on a multi-year program to broaden regional cooperation. The Attorney General said he looked forward to seeing the Action Plan that CARICOM pledged to produce at the recent Suriname meeting, noting that there were other, cost-free steps

countries in the region could take to improve security cooperation in the meantime, notably by acceding to the Caribbean Regional Agreement, the UN Convention against Corruption, and the Proliferation Security Initiative.

¶15. (C) When conversation turned to the administration of justice, the issue of deportee reintegration unfortunately dominated the talks, with some AGs trotting out tired arguments and discredited studies to make baseless assertions that deportees were raising the level and sophistication of crime in the region and that a typical deportee profile was someone without ties to or memory of his country of origin. However, even on this perennially tiresome subject, there was some movement forward as most AGs openly admitted to their responsibility to accept deportees -- an element previously absent from the debate. Barbados' Director of Public Prosecutions, citing his 1999 talks with Attorney General Reno, said the U.S. had yet to fulfill a pledge to provide funding for deportee reintegration as was "only right and fair." The Attorney General acknowledged that more could and would be done on improving information sharing regarding deportees, but also voiced concern that some consulates of Caribbean countries were creating difficulties in the repatriation process by needlessly slowing down processing of nationality and travel documentation, and reminded them of their responsibility in this regard. The Charge added that, on the subject of reintegration programs, assistance had been offered through the International Organization for Migration (IOM) to Haiti, the Bahamas, Jamaica, and Guyana, but only Haiti and the Bahamas had accepted assistance to date.

COMMENT

¶16. (C) The Attorney General's visit provided a huge boost to our bilateral relations with Barbados, as reflected in the

Prime Minister's new formulation of the "friends to all, satellites of none" mantra with the caveat that some friends are closer than others. The warm reception he received throughout the country reflects the goodwill that exists toward the new administration and the country's pride that someone with Barbadian family connections has risen to such a critical position in the U.S. Coming close on the heels of the Suriname Security Cooperation Meeting, and only weeks after the Summit of the Americas, the informal meeting with regional AGs reinforced the perception within the region of a deepening and welcome U.S. commitment to address critical security challenges facing the region. The AG conveyed his interest in hosting Caribbean AGs in Washington later in the year to follow up and the issues and agenda charted in Bridgetown.

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